

MYTHS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

1. If a woman doesn't like it she can always leave.

Women facing domestic violence face a range of practical and psychological barriers to leaving violent relationships. They may attempt to leave 5 or 6 times before they can sever the relationship permanently. Many complex choices are faced with other factors that determine their decision to leave. Some of these fears are being killed or harmed, economic dependence, staying for the sake of the children, reprisals, lack of knowledge to access services that can help, social isolation, emotional attachment to the abuser, shame, low self esteem and lack of confidence and hope that the situation will improve. Remember the perpetrator of violence is usually not always abusive. The woman may still love her partner, and hope the violence goes away. As we all understand the cycle of violence it is obvious that the offender does have a "non-violent" side to him. It is also important to be mindful that this person may not appear to be violent to anybody else in their circle of friends/family & work associates.

2. Women provoke violence or ask for it.

Women have no control over their partner's violence. The woman may be constantly blamed for his behaviour it is vital to reinforce to the woman that violence is not an acceptable way of resolving any conflict. Some women take extraordinary steps to predict what will please or placate her partner to avoid violence. Sometimes this behaviour is also passed on to the children and they will act in the same way.

3. Alcohol consumption is the most common cause of domestic violence.

Some research does correlate between alcohol consumption and domestic violence, but there is also research that indicates the consumption of alcohol did not necessarily determine whether the violence would occur. Alcohol can be frequently used as an excuse by the perpetrator for the violence. Women's experiences indicate that while alcohol may have been consumed by their partners, the men had control over who was the subject of violence and in some cases directed the violence to a woman's body where the bruising would not show.

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4. Domestic violence is not a big problem.

Domestic violence remains a hidden problem in Australian society. It is impossible to accurately indicate the number of domestic violence victims as many women still do not disclose the violence. Domestic violence impacts in many ways outside of the home. Access Economics reported in 2004 that the estimated cost of domestic violence in Australia in 2002-2003 was \$8.1 billion. Another report done in 2004 - the Australian component of the International Violence Against Women Survey found that 34% of women who had a current or former partner experienced at least one form of domestic violence during the lifetime from a partner. It is reported that one in three women experience domestic violence.

5. Domestic violence only happens in lower socio-economic communities.

Domestic violence does not discriminate in socio-economic status. There are some indications that a higher proportion of women in lower socio-economic circumstances experience domestic violence, this may be because they are accessing assistance from government and non-government organizations and may come to the attention of community workers more readily. There is also suggestions that women from higher economic circumstances face other boundaries in reporting the domestic violence such as economic reliability (they may have a large mortgage and she needs the partner's income to remain in the house), status in the community, shame and not realising there are services available to help (they may be working full time and are not able to access any assistance).

6. Domestic violence only occurs in certain cultures/ethnic communities.

Women in all cultures and communities are subject to domestic violence. Women from other cultural and ethnic backgrounds may have other limits to getting support from services such as religious pressure, community pressure, language barriers and not understanding that domestic violence is a crime.

7. Some women seek out abusive men.

There is no evidence to suggest that perpetrators of violence have a distinctive psychological profile. Most abusive men are not abusive to anyone else other than their partner. This would make it difficult for a woman to seek out a violence person in their initial contacts.

8. Violent men are psychiatrically ill and cannot control themselves.

Again it is important to remember that most violence perpetrators are not violent to anyone else other than their partner. Domestic violence is about power and control. Being violent is a choice made by the perpetrator. There are some instances where the perpetrator has a mental health issue or a disability that affects their behaviour, but their behaviour is usually abusive to a number of people – not just the partner.

9. Taking legal action will make things worse.

Taking legal action may place a woman initially in a higher state of fear and cause her concern as to making the situation worse. However, taking legal action and involving the Police can act to ensure the safety of the woman and her children. Reinforcing the importance of reporting breaches of the ADVO is paramount to assisting the woman to take some control back in her life and give the perpetrator consequences for his behaviour.

10. Apprehended Domestic Violence Orders are useless.

Most women will confirm that applying for an ADVO has given them a higher sense of safety. If they report breaches and further bad behaviour there should be consequences for the perpetrator and a realisation that his behaviour is not acceptable. There are always, however, cases where the ADVO is simply a piece of paper. It is in these cases that it is vital that the woman is assisted at Court with support and referrals to ensure she is safe. An important aspect of court assistance is in identifying the safety issues she may have and discussing options she has if she feels unsafe.

11. Women only apply for ADVO's because they want their partner/former partner in trouble or want to improve their family law case.

Going through the justice system is a very daunting and intimidating process. Many women are reluctant at Court in proceeding with their matter and have usually chosen this option as a last resort. In some cases the violence has been brought before the Court because other people (eg: neighbours or relatives) have reported concerns to the Police. Once at Court the client generally is relieved to have the violence named and have the perpetrator held accountable for their behaviour. In the experience of MWDVCAS it is very rare to have a woman attend Court and make false allegations against her partner/ex partner, or to have her attend Court for an ADVO to assist in a family law matter.

**Prepared by Macarthur Women's Domestic Violence Court
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Telephone: (02) 4640 7333**